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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
Sub-Commission on Prevention  
of Discrimination and  
Protection of Minorities  
Fourth session  
Item 5 (b)

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CLASSIFICATION

(Miss Monroe, Mr. Ekstrand and Mr. Shafagh)

1. Basic Documents

The Committee used as the basis of its discussions:

- (1) The Secretariat classification of 1949 (E/CN.4/Sub.2/85);
- (2) The Sub-Commission's own reports, notably that of its third session;
- (3) The replies from governments distributed to the Sub-Commission in the series E/CN.4/Sub.2/122 and addenda.

2. Purpose of Classification

The Committee regarded the purpose of classification as now being narrower than that envisaged when the Secretariat prepared its study in 1949. It attempted only "classification for purposes of protection by the United Nations", and sought to classify only groups "which possess and wish to preserve stable ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics".

Its aim in seeking to classify these was:

- (1) to clarify the conception of a minority;
- (2) "to assist governments in replying to any enquiry on minorities" (Resolution D of 1950); and
- (3) as a more remote target, to assist in solving any "complications and disagreements" to which a demand for the status of a minority needing protection might give rise (Resolution G of 1950).

3. Conflicting Aspects of Classification

During its search, in the replies from governments, for enumeration of types of groups meriting inclusion in its classification, the Committee

became impressed at the number of states which, though they contain groups which possess and preserve special characteristics, are using their best endeavours to fulfil the desires of the groups in question.

The Committee was of the opinion that it is the duty of the Sub-Commission to applaud and encourage the solution of minority problems by these domestic means. It felt, equally, that the Sub-Commission should not propose any action that might hamper governments that are doing their best for the minorities within their jurisdiction. It feared that one effect of establishing a detailed classification might be to induce groups who are at present contented and well-treated to apply - from some irrelevant motive such as self-importance for an international status and special privileges. The United Nations must not create minority consciousness.

At the same time it is the clear duty of the Sub-Commission to provide an international recourse for minorities who genuinely need it. Duty pulls both ways. But, on balance, the Committee felt that the right moment at which to classify was upon receipt of applications for help.

4. Recommendation

The Committee therefore recommends the Sub-Commission:

- (1) To recognize that, in the light of the replies received from governments under resolution 303 F (XI) of the Economic and Social Council, the ideal method of settling minority problems is by internal legislation and practice.
- (2) To express its satisfaction that so many governments are using their best endeavours to this end.
- (3) To refrain from classifying minorities, in greater detail than that afforded by its definition of minorities until it is known who desires and applies for international help.

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